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Woodbury after school instructor Carol Ray (center, back) leads students in a parachute and ball activity last week.

photo by Vanessa Fournier

Representative Peter Welch Visits Hardwick

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — On Thursday, U.S. Representative Peter Welch (D-Vt), toured the Northeast Kingdom to speak with constituents about their issues and concerns. During a 45-minute stop at the Memorial Building, the topics ranged from agriculture to guns to healthcare. More than a dozen area residents attended the Hardwick sessions.

One theme of the discussion was the amount of division in Washington and among the American public.

"It's worrisome," Welch said. "I've been serving 12 years and I haven't seen the kind of dysfunction that we've had [recently].

He referenced the impact of social media, cable networks, and other media outlets that cater to a specific viewpoint, which drives polarization toward the extremes of the political spectrum.

"Right now, it's very disruptive and there's a lot of division down [in Washington]," he said.

Welch did not refrain from criticizing his Republican counterparts and the Trump administration for what he described as a non-transparent lawmaking process. He argued that there was little in the

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photo by June Pichel Cook

U.S. Representative Peter Welch visited Craftsbury to meet with town officials and farmers. He met with the Broadband Committee, Sung-Hee Chen at the Craftsbury Public House, and Pete Johnson of Pete's Greens. Left to Right: Kristin Fountain (Broad Band Committee), U.S. Rep. Peter Welch, David Stoner (Broadband Committee), Jim Jones (Select Board), and Bruce Ure (Chair, Select Board).

Jury Trial Going Forward for 2015 Greensboro Murder Case

by Michael Bielawski

NEWPORT — State and defense attorneys working on the case of the shooting death of Lou Ron Schneider in 2015 in Greensboro met on Friday at the Orleans County Criminal Court in Newport to discuss a potential trial date.

Earlier in the week, Judge Robert Bent denied a motion to dismiss the second-degree murder and voluntary manslaughter charges against the defendant, Ryan Bacon, who was age 30 at the time he was accused of shooting Schneider.

On Aug. 25 of 2015, Bacon allegedly got into an argument with Schneider at his home on The Bend Road in Greensboro, which resulted in Bacon shooting Schneider. He survived long enough to tell Hardwick Police Detective Kevin Lehoe that it was Bacon who shot him.

Bacon had initially fled the scene, then he turned himself into police at the Hardwick Police Station the next day. The gun that was allegedly used was found in the woods by police.

Schneider's son, Heath Schneider, was at the house at the time of the shooting. According to a motion to dismiss document filed by Bacon's defense lawyer, Jon D. Valsangiacomo, Heath Schneider's story changed throughout the investigation.

Schneider initially claimed he witnessed his father's shooting. He said his father had demanded that Bacon leave his property and that Bacon then went to his truck, where he retrieved a rifle and came back to shoot Lou Ron Schneider.

Then, several weeks later, when Heath Schneider was questioned by state police detective sergeant Jacob Zorn, he said he did not see the shooting, after all. Valsangiacomo's motion to dismiss document states:

"Regarding his inconsistent and ever-changing story as to what he saw and heard, lead investigator Vermont State Police Detective Jacob Zorn, stated in his deposition, 'there have been significant inconsistencies' regarding Heath Schneider's accounting of what happened, and the fact that Heath had difference in his stories that have been significantly inconsistent definitely cause me concern."

According to the motion to dismiss, another issue which Valsangiacomo disputes is whether Lou Ron Schneider had a gun and was threatening Bacon before the fatal shooting occurred. Valsangiacomo alleges the possibility that a gun could have been removed from Lou Ron Schneider before investigators arrived at the scene.

In the motion, he further argues that it was the fault of law enforcement for not thoroughly investigating all possibilities at the initial scene. He said police should have examined every firearm on the premise, of which there were many.

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photo by Vanessa Fournier

Matt Willey of MT Bucket Maple in Walden, checks out the grade of syrup he is producing. He has made 725 gallons so far from his 2,700 taps.

Cabot School Board Holds Budget Meeting

by Ray Small

CABOT — The Cabot School Board held an informational meeting to discuss the revised school budget in preparation for Thursday's second attempt to gain voter approval for school funding.

Approximately 20 people, including school board members, gathered in the school's library on Monday night. The agenda was to review the new proposed budget numbers and to highlight the differences between the first and second version of the budget. School board chair Chris Tormey led the first part of the meeting, detailing the changes in a slide presentation.

The new proposed budget, Tormey said, "tries to balance what is needed for the school with the community's ability to support it."

The proposed expenditures for 2018-19 total $3,566,885, an increase of $234,105, or seven percent, over the previous year. The budget that was voted down on Town Meeting day proposed a total increase of 16.8 percent.

Reductions in the new proposal include a community connections coordinator ($38,000), a part-time custodian ($24,000), reduced spending for a new elementary counselor ($19,000) and a reduction of funds from the Capital Project Fund ($22,000).

Proposed increases include more funding for instructional salaries and benefits that are mandated by existing contracts, plus increasing the number of days for a high school senior capstone project coordinator ($47,675); special education ($134,499); a new elementary counselor ($45,716); technology spending for mandated software upgrades and student laptops ($16,019); and a Supervisory Union assessment ($11,798).

The increase in special education is based on the increasing number of students who require special education services. Similarly, the additional money for the elementary counselor is based on the need to provide support and counseling for students in pre-K through grade 6.

The proposed budget will increase the local Homestead Tax Rate from $1.7317 to $1.9039 per $100 of assessed property value, a 9.9 percent increase.

According to the figures in Tormey's presentation, the Homestead Tax Rate is driven by factors largely beyond the school board's control. Education spending is determined by the school board. However, the number of equalized pupils is determined by enrollment. The estimated property yield, the Vermont Base Education tax rate and Cabot's Common Level of Appraisal are all set by the state. The budget also reflects a Vermont excess spending penalty, which increases the budget increase from 7.6 percent to the final 9.9 percent figure.

Tormey highlighted that, in 2017, 347 Cabot households received property tax reductions by paying according to household income, rather than home value. He said that approximately three quarters of Cabot households pay property taxes based on income level. His analysis states that households paying the Homestead Tax based on income will see an increase of three percent in the revised budget. For these households, the Homestead Tax will increase $9 by $10,000 of household income.

The meeting was opened for discussion at the conclusion of the presentation. Tormey, Washington Northeast Supervisory Union Superintendent Mark Tucker and Cabot School Principal David Schilling fielded most of the questions.

Nils Larsen asked what effect

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photo by Vanessa Fournier

Ruby Baker (left) of Cabot, a five-year employee and former executive director of the Hardwick Area Food Pantry is helping to work for the Community of Vermont Elders (COVE). On March 31, she handed over her keys to the new Executive Director, Laura Wilkinson (right) of Hardwick.

Hardwick Area Food Pantry Welcomes New Executive Director

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — The Hardwick Area Food Pantry is getting a new executive director. Laura Wilkinson, from Scotland, will succeed Ruby Dale-Brown at the helm of the organization's day-to-day operations. She brings experience in helping people in need from overseas and across the country.

"I really look forward to serving the local community and improving the services already available," she said. "I would love to hear more feedback and be able to customize it to meet their needs and increase the amount of local food available."

Wilkinson said her background is in gardening and therapeutic work with adults. Her experience in helping people in need started in her native Scotland where she and her American wife volunteered for Newton Dee, an organization that focuses on adults with special needs.

Moving from Scotland, the couple first lived in California and then moved to locations throughout the United States, including Missouri, St. Louis, and Alaska. She said she tried to get into similar work in other parts of the country, but the state aid was not as available as it

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Select Board Meeting Starts with Show of Support for Police Chief

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK – Last week's select board meeting started with a show of support for police chief Aaron Cochran. Cochran spoke against bill S.55 at the statehouse, as part of a news conference held by Vermont Law Enforcement Against Gun Control on March 27. S.55, officially titled "An act relating to the disposition of unlawful and abandoned firearms," is part of a set of school safety and firearm control laws supported by Governor Phil Scott.

The select board received at least one letter protesting that Chief Cochran participated in the news conference while wearing his uniform.

Resident Mark Salls was one of the first to speak.

"We heard that a few people wrote letters to the select board about him going down and testifying in uniform against this bill, S.55. In my opinion, he didn't do anything wrong, he just went down and said why he was against the bill. He wasn't protesting," he said. "I know several said he was representing the town, but he never once mentioned it. Most of these people support him for doing what he felt was right, and we don't see anything wrong with what he did."

Lawrence Hamel also weighed in.

"I was proud to have somebody in that room that actually knew the law and what he was talking about because most of the people who were passing these laws had no idea what they were passing, they just had the idea that they had to do something."

In all, about a dozen residents spoke on Cochran's behalf. The chief also thanked everyone for their support.

"I do appreciate it. I did stand up for what I thought was right and what was right for you," he said. "I'd do it again in a heartbeat. It's good to know that somebody thinks that I did something right, we in law enforcement often don't hear that."

Cochran was busy for much the rest of the meeting. During his police report, he spoke about a new school safety strategy being developed as part of a statewide school safety assessment ordered by Governor Phil Scott.

Cochran said that local school staff is looking evaluating the ALICE Training (Active Shooter Response Training).

"Instead of acting like sheep in the corner, so to speak, where they lock the doors and hide in a corner, pull the shades, this is a different type of training," he said.

"They teach them essentially to fight for their lives, because they are in a fight for their lives."

At another point in his report, he talked about the emergence of marijuana laced with opiates.

"I don't if anybody has heard on the news back a few weeks ago, but marijuana laced with opiates is showing up in Vermont and some of it which we seized tested positive for both marijuana and opiates."

There was updated discussion on a proposed net-metering solar project. Alex Bravakis of Novus Energy Development presented the project as a sound investment in green energy, whereas the town's electric utility manager, Mike Sullivan, advised that it will drive up energy costs for the utility and, therefore, ratepayers.

"We have conflicting information," board member Danny Hale said. "As we continue to have discussions about HED (Hardwick Electric Department), I'm starting

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In Sports, *10*
New Blood for Hazen Baseball

In Towns, *2*
Calais Needs New Select board Administrator

In Arts, *6*
Scottish Music Kicks Off New Season